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AUTHOR Toner, Ignatius J.; Hagan, Margaret S.
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ABSTRACT

To investigate the influence of instructional behaviors and adult expectations on children's task performance, 48 boys either 5 to 6 or 8 to 9 years of age individually viewed instructional videotapes and participated in a delay of gratification task. In the first phase of the study, videotapes were produced in which instructors were told to communicate, in whatever manner desired, specified task rules to an absent target child. Target children were either labeled "patient" or assigned a task-irrelevant label concerning friendliness. In addition, instructors were told the approximate age of their target child. Instructors and a "jury" of 10 undergraduates were asked to predict target children's task performance. Finally, instructors' taped performances were assessed for variation along several dimensions. In the second phase, each child was shown one of the instructional videotapes, asked questions to assess comprehension of task rules, and administered the task. Subjects' classroom teachers were asked to predict performance. Among the findings were the following: (1) Older children instructed by adults expecting a patient viewer delayed gratification longer than did other children; (2) In general, older children understood rules more fully than did younger children; and (3) Adult expectations were more predictive of children's rule comprehension than they were of actual delay behavior. (Author/RH)

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The Effects of Instructor Expectation and Performance on Child Comprehension and Performance

Ignatius J. Toner and Margaret S. Hagan

Department of Psychology

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Charlotte North Carolina 28223, USA

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Abstract

The major purpose of the present investigation was to determine the influence of various instructional behaviors, determined in part by labels concerning children's characteristics, and of adult expectations on the subsequent reactions of children. These influences were noted on both the ability of the children to comprehend the content of the instruction (i.e., the child's subsequent knowledge and understanding of rules of a task in which they were to be engaged) and on the ability and/or willingness of instructed children to display self-control on the task assessing their delay of gratification behavior.

Older children instructed by adults expecting a patient viewer did indeed demonstrate a higher level of delay. In general, older children understood the rules more fully and waited longer than did younger children. It was also found that adult expectations regarding children's behavior were more predictive of the children's rule comprehension than of the children's actual delay behavior. Other inter-relationships between instructor behaviors, adult expectations, and child comprehension and performance were found.

The Effects of Instructor Expectation and Performance on Child Comprehension and Performance

In two recent investigations, researchers have noted that the child's ability to postpone immediate gratification can be significantly influenced by what others say to the child about that child's expected performance. Toner, Moore and Emmons (1980) investigated the effect of an adult telling the first-grade child beforehand that the child is "patient" on that child's subsequent waiting behavior. Children so labeled waited significantly longer before taking accumulating candy rewards than did children not given the task-relevant label. Ritchie and Toner (1981) have found that even preschoolers are affected by such labeling. Further, these researchers found that labels about the children's patience provided to testers (but not to the children) also significantly influenced the children's subsequent delay behavior, but only when the children themselves were not directly provided with a relevant label.

With the demonstrated outcome of direct (to the child) and indirect (to the tester) labeling, several issues of theoretical and practical significance had yet to be addressed. First, when labels regarding a child's probable behavior are given to the tester but not to the child, how does this information affect tester behavior and expectancy and thus exert influence on the child's behavior? Second, are tester expectation and performance influenced by the age of the target child?

Toner and Hagan (1983) have recently reported that information provided to adults about a child beforehand can influence both their expectations and their performance when interacting with the child. Instructors told that the child was patient were more likely to read rules

of a self-control task to the child verbatim than were instructors given the task-irrelevant label about the child. Further, for instructors of 5-year-olds, those told that the child was patient took more time initially presenting rules than did those told nothing about the child's patience. For instructors of 10-year-olds, those told that the child was patient took significantly less time presenting the rules than did instructors told nothing about the child's patience. The instructors' predictions of their target child's self-control were affected by the age of the child but were not affected by the label. In addition, these predictions were not related to any behavior the instructors demonstrated on the video tape. A jury of other adults who viewed the performance of each instructor based their own predictions of child performance on a number of observable behaviors displayed by the instructors.

While the manner in which "indirect" labeling of children achieves its outcome by altering adult expectations and observable behaviors had been further clarified, an important element in the dynamics of label-influenced interaction remained to be investigated. The previous study focused exclusively on the reactions of adults to labels about children. It was necessary to study the influence of various instructional behaviors and adult expectations, determined in part by labels, on the subsequent reactions of children. The major purpose of the present investigation was to study this influence on both the ability of the children to comprehend the content of the instruction (i.e., the child's subsequent knowledge and understanding of the rules) and on the ability and/or willingness of children who have been subjected to the adult instruction to display self-control on the task assessing their delay of gratification behavior.

Method

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, described by Toner and Hagan (1983), 48 undergraduate females served as instructors. Each instructor performed on a two-minute video tape which, she was told, was to serve as the instructional tape to be shown to an individual boy before he engaged in a task assessing his self-imposed delay of gratification. The task involved the child's waiting for accumulating candy rewards, the possession of which was made contingent upon the child's stopping further accumulation. Separately taped, each instructor was told to convey the rules of the task to the child in whatever manner she wished. Explicit rules for the delay task were provided on an index card placed in front of each instructor prior to the taping. The rules were as follows:

> The lady who is with you will start the Candy Game by putting one M & M candy on the table. The candy will be yours when you take it. You can take the candy or wait for her to put more on the table. She will put one candy on the table each minute. The last rule of the game is that when you take the candy, the lady will stop putting candy on the table and the game will be over.

Half of the instructors were told beforehand that the particular child who would see their tape was quite patient when involved in similar delay tasks. The other half of the instructors were given a task-irrelevant label (regarding the friendliness of the child) prior to making the instructional tape. Further, half of the instructors were told that their target child was five years old while the remainder were told that their target child was ten years old. Each instructor then presented the rules

while seated alone at a table facing the camera.

When the taping was completed, each instructor was asked to predict how long their target child would actually delay gratification after he viewed their instructional tape. All 48 individual tapes were then subjected to two separate reviews. First, each tape was presented to a "jury" of ten undergraduates who were unaware of the age and label manipulations and who independently predicted how long the target child for each tape would actually wait. The second review involved a specific behavioral examination of the taped performances of the instructors by two raters who were also unaware of the information which had been provided to the instructors about the children. Specific instructor behaviors recorded by these two raters included (1) whether the rules of the delay task were presented verbatim from the index card, (2) the length of time used to initially present the rules, (3) the total amount of time the instructor spoke, (4) the number of questions posed by the instructor, (5) the amount of instructor gazing at camera, and (6) the amount of instructor smiling.

In the second phase of the study, 48 boys were each shown one of the instructional video tapes. Their subsequent level of understanding of the rules of the delay task and their actual delay behavior was assessed. The boys were of two different age groups. The children in the first group were five- and six-year-olds and the children in the second group were eight- and nine-year-olds. Boys in the first group were individually shown instructional tapes made by adults expecting a five-year-old viewer while those in the second group were individually shown instructional tapes made by adults expecting a ten-year-old viewer. Half of the boys within each age group viewed a tape made by an instructor expecting a patient viewer while the

remainder of each group viewed a tape made by an instructor who did not have the expectation regarding the patience of the viewer.

Each child, after he viewed his instructional tape, was asked five questions to determine his comprehension of the rules of the delay task. The five questions dealt with different aspects of the rules which were specifically and unambiguously addressed in the written instructions provided to the adult instructors. A particular child's comprehension score was the sum of his correct responses to the five questions.

Following the assessment of rule comprehension, each boy was then individually administered the delay of gratification task. One piece of candy was placed on the table in front of the boy every 60 seconds and, as each candy was put down, the boy was told, "You can take the candy now or wait for more if you want to." The game ended when the boy picked up the candy or after 900 seconds. The measure of actual delay behavior was the number of seconds which had elapsed between the placement of the first candy and the termination of the game.

Finally, each child's classroom teacher was asked to predict how long each child would actually wait for the accumulating candy rewards.

Results

Initial two-way ANOVAS (age x label) were performed on each of the dependent variables.

Regarding adult expectation, the instructors and the teachers expected longer delay in the older children than in the younger children. Even the jury predicted longer delay in children who would view tapes made by instructors expecting older viewers. No effect of the patience label was found on stated adult expectations.

Regarding the performance of the child, the older children scored higher

on the comprehension test than did the younger children. In general, these older children also waited longer in the delay task but there was a significant age x label interaction. For the younger children, labels regarding patience given to the instructors had no effect on the child's delay performance. For the older children, those who viewed video tapes made by instructors expecting a patient viewer waited significantly longer on the task than did agemates who viewed tapes made by instructors who did not expect patience in the viewer.

Correlations between the dependent variables were separately computed for each age group of target child.

For the younger children, only jury predictions were significantly related to the child's actual delay performance. Instructors and teachers, though asked to predict the child's delay behavior, actually predicted the child's comprehension of game rules rather than game performance. Finally, the delay behavior of these younger children was positively related to but one behavior demonstrated on the video tape by the instructor--the amount of time the instructor took to initially present the game rules. Children's comprehension scores were not significantly related to any instructor behavior.

For the older children, none of the adults successfully predicted actual delay behavior. However, again even though they were asked to predict delay behavior, both the jury and the teachers actually predicted the comprehension of game rules by the children. Finally, the delay behavior of these older children was significantly related to but one instructor behavior in that the more questions the instructor posed on the video tape, the less the child actually delayed in the candy game. As was the case with the younger children, the comprehension scores of the older

children was not significantly related to any instructor behaviors. For neither age group of children were comprehension scores significantly related to actual delay performance.

Conclusion

The present study further clarified how adult performance and expectations influence a child's subsequent knowledge and performance. Adults relied heavily on the age of the child to determine their expectations of child performance and, indeed, older children did understand rules more fully and did demonstrate more delay behavior than did younger children. However, when age of child was held constant, adults were not impressively accurate in predicting how a particular child would behave. But adults were not randomly inaccurate in their predictions. Surprisingly, these adults accurately predicted something other than actual performance--they unwittingly predicted rule comprehension in the child. As we noted, a child's rule comprehension was not predictive of that child's actual performance on the task to which the rules applied.

When the instructors were given information about the viewer's age and patience, they conveyed this information to the viewer and the viewer did indeed react. Yet the provision of label of patience did not influence stated instructor predictions even though this label strongly influenced the performance of the older children. Clearly, the effect of the label regarding patience given to the instructors was, of necessity, transmitted by their performance. However, the instructors only used the information regarding the child's age to alter their expectations.

In sum, the preliminary findings presented here include some predictable results and several problematic ones as well. Subsequent, closer inspection of the data will further clarify how labels provided to adults about children achieve their influence.

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